



DEFENSE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
For Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury

Empowering the Family Support Structure Through Opportunity, Information, and Assistance

SPARRC Family Subcommittee

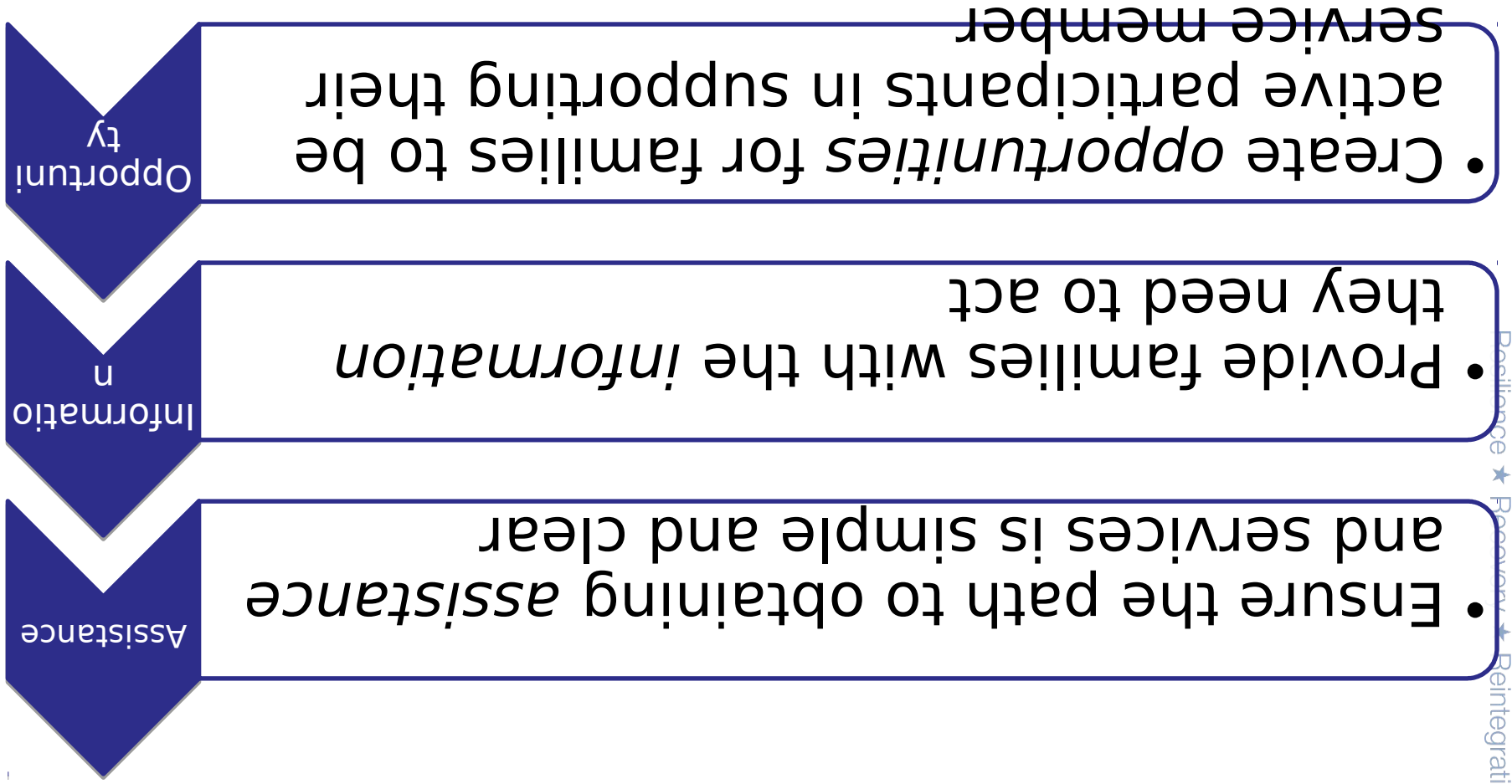


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The Importance of Family in Maintaining Mental Health of Service Members

- **Extended family, parents, spouses, children, and friends potentially provide the best avenue of help for service members**
 - Outside of military chain of command
 - Informal communications that are off the record
 - Established relationships enable detecting changes in behavior
- **The family support structure is a powerful tool in sustaining the mental health of service members. The recommendations in this report will empower the support structure following three tenets:**
 - Opportunity
 - Information
 - Assistance

Empowering the Family Support Structure



Create *Opportunities* For Families To Be Active Participants In Supporting Their Service Member

- **Create connections between the family, their service, and the service member through communications that are *local, personal, and positive***
- **Begin collecting contact information for the family so that local chain of command, chaplain, and ombudsman can reach out on an individual basis**
- **Craft and send positive themed letters to families specifically requesting their assistance and emphasizing the key role they play in supporting the service member**
- **Support family members in building rapport with nearest base/installation and identifying useful resources**
- **Encourage communication (when possible) between the service member and family/friends**

Provide Family With The *Information* They Need To Act

- **Identify definitive sources of information - the starting hubs for information**
 - Risk Factors – what to look for
 - Website
 - Telephone
 - Handout – refrigerator magnet
- **Increase awareness of the definitive sources identified above**
- **Create a “Need to Know” template for family to have (unit, CO, base/installation, base chaplain etc...)**
- **Provide handouts with relevant information for service member and his/her family (Medical Treatment Facility, Red Cross, etc.)**
- **Provide contact information for service member’s chain of command and chaplain**
- **Create a “what to do” template for family members**

The SPARRC Family Subcommittee Has Completed The Following Initiatives To *Provide Information To The Family*

- **Agreed on the following as definitive sources of information**
 - Website: SPARRC website – central Internet hub with links to suicide prevention information across all services
 - Telephone: 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255) – central telephone hub for suicide prevention and crisis intervention
- **Created the Ask Care Escort (ACE) card for Family members - includes local information**
- **Partnered with USAA non-profit to develop two reports for distribution across a wide audience that highlight suicide prevention resources**

Ensure The Path To Obtaining Assistance And Services Is Simple And Clear

Empowered with opportunities to communicate and support their service member and armed with the relevant information, how does the family proceed if they require assistance for their service member?

- **Create a hub and spoke model for suicide prevention resources, with the hubs defined as the definitive sources of information specified previously**
- **Define an assistance path from each hub out to pertinent sources of assistance.**
 - For example, if a family member were to phone into a call center with unit, chain of command, and base information for their service member, the call center could identify the relevant party to contact for assistance
 - This assistance path could be a directory of chaplains or equivalent support at all base locations, a detailed call plan for every service, or something in between

Defining the Path to *Assistance*

(Cont'd)

- **Keep the family updated and in the communication loop as assistance is being sought and administered.**
 - A tremendous amount of effort has been extended in creating a sense of trust and connection between the services and families
 - It is vital that this connection be maintained during a crisis event
- **Evaluate each suicide prevention resource and define its location in the assistance pathway**

Recommendations To Successful Implementation

- **Educate current military leaders on the importance of being available to families**
- **Build infrastructure so that family members can maintain contact with their service member when he/she is deployed**
- **Encourage leadership to provide family members with external support when the service member does not identify any external support systems**
- **Train first responders and leadership on best practices when responding to suicidal behaviors**

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